



## *Lions Gate Buddhist Priory*

P.O. Box 701 Lytton, British Columbia V0K 1Z0

Dear Friends,

We have just passed through the darkest time of the turning year, the Winter Solstice and the longest night. Many religions and peoples have placed a Festival of Light at this place as a strong marker of the turning year and as a reminder of the faith and effort needed to "turn darkness into light". For our own will and effort are indeed required to "turn around and look up" to see the small point of brightness in the dark – so small a brightness that at times we have been unsure if we were actually seeing it.

Faith at its minimum definition is, to me, a belief that there is something greater than oneself, something more than what we see, greater than ordinary mind. And, as a result, a way of living in which the "unreality" is seen and exposed by orienting ourselves to the Real – that takes into account that we did not begin our journey with our birth nor will we end it with our death - a life that has enduring meaning and that does not simply end in meaninglessness. The greatest joy and satisfaction in my life has come from "taking the road less traveled" which for me was in choosing to become a monk.

In the middle of this dark time of the year it is traditional for Zen monks, such as myself, to "sit with Shakyamuni" to hold seven days of enclosed meditation ending with the celebration of the Enlightenment. Thanks to the continued support of the members and friends of Lions Gate Priory and the Edmonton meditation group over many years, our monks, your monks, have been able to do this for the first time on Dragon Flower Mountain and we are deeply grateful to you all.

The benefits of this ongoing support have effects that go far beyond the monastic community. The one hundred and sixty acres of Dragon Flower Mountain serve as an animal sanctuary where medicinal, flowering and food plants are protected and all beings can find spiritual refreshment just from being up on the land. Because of this support we are also able to provide a place of retreat and refuge for monks and laity of the wider Order as well as Canadian members and to train monks so that there will be Teachers of the Dharma for future generations.

Our community here has grown in entirely unexpected ways over the last year and now consists of two Seniors: Reverend Master Aurelian and myself, and two Novices, Rev. Valeria and Rev. Brian.

We look forward to a peaceful New Year 2012 and wish the same for all of you.

With all good wishes and in gasshō,

Kōten